

- *THE ROUGH GRAFT* -

NEWSLETTER OF SOLARIS FARMS, REEDSVILLE, WI



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In this issue we address a few items resultant from the developing COVID-19 pandemic, including the cancellation of the annual American Peony Society convention, and what we're doing in our gardens during isolation. In response to this situation, too, Solaris Farms will be making a few new plants available in our online store for shipment this fall. We also are still welcoming individuals or small parties to the farm this year by making an appointment, and anyone doing so will get a special discount on any plants available to take home during their visit. To wrap up, I thought I would talk about something I'm sorting through in my own isolation - a commonly-faced scenario I began to find myself in this past fall, that is, what to do when you move to a new home and want to take your garden with you?

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WHAT ARE YOU DOING JUNE 11-14?

With the APS Convention called off this year, I talked to a few gardeners to find out what they'll be doing instead - activities that include participating in the APS Un-Convention-al online auction

As I write this I am, like many of you, sheltering at home. Like many of you, too, I venture out to go for walks and get a bit of fresh air. I've been tending to my yard as much as possible, and certainly there are plenty of garden tasks that need attention right now that will get you out of the house. I have found a number of trees that need to come down this spring, and have been trimming branches as well - now is the time. I also found about two dozen peony seedlings sprouting in plastic bags in my garage where I placed them as seeds late last fall. Planting them in pots became another (albeit small) task that occupied at least some of my time at home. I've been putting them out in the sun during the day and bringing them back into my heated garage at night until I'm ready to plant them in the ground - likely not until fall.

*Stay tuned to **americanpeonysociety.org**
for more details as June 11th approaches.*

Maybe you forgot to trim back your herbaceous peonies last year, or maybe your tree peonies could use a pruning... and I know there are quite a few of you who never get around to clean up your dried up daylily scapes (I say this because I never get around to cleaning them up myself!) Some of the difficulty comes, though, in that there are a number of projects I'd like to begin, but I don't have the supplies I need. I have both a ficus and a schefflera indoors that need to be repotted, but I would need to head out to a garden center or hardware store to get fresh potting soil. These businesses are still open in Wisconsin, as they fall into the category of "essential", but I hesitate to go. Is my need for potting soil or a new larger container really essential? I've resorted to ordering a few things online, having them delivered to my door. I guess my advice if you're looking for it is to do the projects you can, or get creative with what you have on hand. Maybe you can't do everything you would like to, but in viewing gardening as a means to get you outside, you'll have an effective tool to refocus your attention on something other than those bleak news headlines, and still keep you at a distance from others. If you can do them without a lot of extra supplies, it can be an opportunity to finally get after some of those bigger projects that you've been putting off for years.

To get some ideas about what I could be doing in my own yard, I decided to reach out to a few fellow gardeners and find out what they're up to. It's still somewhat early, but more than one person has told me that they've ordered a large amount of mulch and are recovering the entirety of their garden beds - a task that needs to be accomplished every few years or so if you top with a bark or chipped wood mulch. Some are planning whole new gardens, or repurposing old areas, modifying or updating garden infrastructure with their newfound free time. At Solaris this spring, we have been keeping ourselves busy with a number of different tasks - some of them typical, such as mulching grafting beds, cleaning up the apple orchard, and updating signage. A more unusual project we've been working on is the construction of a large walk-in cooler for cut flower storage. We were looking forward to utilizing it for this year's APS flower show among a few other events, but unfortunately, it seems that will not be in the cards for us this year, nor for anyone else.

Isolation can be an opportunity to finally get after some of those bigger projects that you've been putting off for years.

It is, indeed, quite regrettable this pandemic has led to the cancellation of all manner of gatherings previously scheduled out into the summer. Perhaps one of the most disappointing cancellation being the American Peony Society's annual convention that was slated to take place at the beautiful and sprawling Chicago Botanical Garden. The opportunity this convention affords enthusiasts and growers to meet all at once in a single location is something regular participants look forward to year long. So many of us were saddened to learn that there would be no gathering this year, no garden tours, no flower show, no auct - oh wait, I may have spoken too soon! The APS IS holding its auction this year regardless of the cancellation, and the whole thing will take place online. All is not lost - one only needs to make sure they are an APS member to participate. Memberships can be purchased on the APS website at americanpeonysociety.org/product/membership.



The conventions are always great occasions to see interesting plants (and people)...

I'll let all of you reading in on a little secret, too - Solaris Farms will be donating some particularly outstanding plants to the auction this year. Stellar representatives from every sort of peony from species to herbaceous hybrids, intersectionals, and woodies. There will be something great for everyone to bid on come June 11th. Stay tuned to americanpeonysociety.org for more details as the date approaches. If you plan on getting your hands on some new plants this fall, then you already have a project on your list - get out there and spruce up some new areas in your garden to accommodate them. Even if you're feeling down due to your isolation, being outside and focused on work has always done wonders for me, and there has been no better time than the present, certainly, to take advantage of this.



NEWLY AVAILABLE

ONLINE

Additional plants to be offered in the Solaris catalog and special discounts given to farm visitors

Unfortunately due to the current state of the world, it may be the case that farm visits will be off the table this year for many. In response, however, we have decided to make a number of products available for fall delivery that would otherwise be farm exclusives. An array of lily bulbs, including martagon, asiatic, oriental, trumpet and orienpet, as well as our cold-hardy cactus *opuntia humifusa* will all be available for online ordering soon, and will be shipped out in fall. At the same time, we will be offering a **15% discount** to anyone who has made an appointment to visit the farm this year, on any plants available to take home during their visit - this includes any martagon lilies, or other liliium available, daylilies dug on site, hardy cactus, or clematis varieties available in pots. For those who have already acquired some of these interesting specimens, you will be delighted to know that we are also adding a few new cultivars among them that have never been among our offerings. If you are unfamiliar with these plants entirely, read on and I'll give you a brief rundown, and I'm certain everyone will find something new and exciting to plant in their garden this year.

Martagon lilies

These really are some awesome plants. I grow six or seven different cultivars in my own garden, and I love them all. Ranging in size from moderate heights (2ft+) to quite tall (6ft), they are equally useful as both a specimen for the middle of the garden, or a tall backdrop. They have a wide range of colors, as well, from a lovely white (*martagon albiflorum*), to yellows and oranges, pinks, and stunning deep reds. If these qualities weren't enough to make you want to add them to your garden, they are somewhat unique in their ability to tolerate shade.



martagon var. albiflorum

I grow them in a north facing garden that got almost no direct sunlight. They are definitely a way to achieve great color and foliage interest in areas of your garden where you might otherwise be hung up on what to plant.

Martagons occur naturally throughout southern Europe from Portugal through to Russia and Siberia growing on the edge of forests in limey soil and on hillsides with a limestone substrate. Resultantly, they prefer well-watered, but well-drained soil. When I planted mine, I threw about a 1/2"-3/4" layer of gravel into the holes I dug for my bulbs, and then mixed a bit of lime into the backfill. The hole can be about 5-6" deep, and the bulbs will push themselves deeper as they grow older in that location. You will also see them send up additional shoots from year to year, too, creating a nice clump in their location.



Above, martagon lily "Atawa", and mustard-hued hansonii at right



I will say, also, that the only problem I experienced was in the first year after planting. Nearly all of my spring shoots were chewed off by rabbits, stunting their growth somewhat that season. My plants still bloomed, but they were not nearly as impressive as they might have been. A simple chickenwire cage placed around the spring shoots staked with a few pieces of bamboo or metal stakes did the trick in protecting them every year thereafter.

Cold-hardy cactus, *Opuntia humifusa*

This is a little plant that I adore having in my garden. I am always asked about care - primarily if I have to dig it up and bring it in every fall. The answer is, of course, no, as it goes dormant when the weather turns cold and does just fine out of doors through the cold Wisconsin winter. When left alone for several years, it can turn into a sprawling mass of pads, but I kept mine growing in a very small patch of sandy garden bed at the front of my old house near the sidewalk. I loved to watch people walking stop to check it out, and my favorite thing to hear was children exclaiming that they found a cactus while walking by... I heard more than a few parents who didn't believe them until they saw it with their own eyes! *Opuntia humifusa*, sometimes referred to as low or smooth prickly pear, is native to North America with a range extending from Montana all the way to the East Coast and south through Mexico.



Opuntia humifusa in bloom, showing off its yellow flowers, each of which will turn into brightly-colored red, edible fruit.



Protect spring shoots from rabbits with a simple, staked chicken wire cage.

It favors a drier, well-drained spot with lots of sunshine and is perfect for your rock garden. Given enough space, it will take a walk, and multiply prolifically into a sprawling patch. Here in Wisconsin, flowering occurs in very early summer with smattering of waxy, butter-yellow blossoms that often have a reddish or orangish tinge to their centers. The flowers yield to red-colored fruits that ripen sometime thereafter and are edible, (along with the rest of the plant for that matter), with an assortment of fun and interesting recipes available online.

Asiatic, Oriental, Trumpet, and Orienpet lilies

If you've been out to the farm, you know that Nate has been growing a huge assortment of these beautiful and highly fragrant plants for years now, and this year, anyone who makes an appointment will receive that special discount on whatever lilies they decide to take home (unfortunately we won't be shipping these this year, so you'll have to come out to see us if you want to get your hands on them!). Like the martagons, these grow in a range of sizes, though theirs is a wider spectrum. While some cultivars come in at about a foot or two, others will reach nearly ten feet into the air. An equally wide array of colors are available in both solid hues and varied combinations or patterns.



Orienpet lily "Esta Bonita"



Asiatic lily "Blackout"

Like martagons, too, these lilies appreciate well-drained soil, but would prefer a sunnier location. Again, if you find a spot, but the soil is of a heavier composition be sure to mix in an amount of gravel and/or sand before planting.

Telling the difference between these varied types of lilies can be a bit challenging, but given a proper initiation, one will realize that they are all quite different from one another in appearance, habit, and bloom time. Here's a quick reference guide:

Asiatic

These lilies are the shortest of the lilies, most growing from 2-3 feet. In our Wisconsin climate, they bloom around the second week of July and earlier in warmer regions. Their flowers are rather star-shaped and face upward and outward at the top of their stalks.



Asiatic lily "Kentucky"



*Above, oriental lily "Tiger Woods",
at left, trumpet lily "Pink Perfection"*

Oriental

Typically, these grow just a bit taller than the asiatic lilies at about 3-4 feet. Their flowers share an outward/upward facing star shape, but the ends of the petals often curl backward slightly, and have a slightly wavy edge. Common colors include whites to pinks/reds, and various combinations therein. Most have a textured speckled pattern on their petals as well.



Trumpet

Trumpet lilies are taller still, typically growing 4-6 feet, but can often reach taller heights, and are often in bloom by midsummer. Unlike asiatic, but similar to oriental lilies, trumpets are extremely, sweetly fragrant, often releasing their aroma late in the day and into early evening.

Orienpet

As the name suggests, this cross between the oriental and trumpet lily is equally tall and fragrant (4-6+ feet), though features a somewhat wider and stouter flower form than its trumpet parent. "Caravans" seen here carries the distinct wavy petal edge of its oriental parent, and this hybrid appears in a huge range of colors derivative of both parents.



Orienpet lily "Lavon"



MOVING AND TAKING YOUR GARDEN WITH YOU

What to do when you change location and how to ensure your plants successfully make it through the transition

Moving is a stressful process no matter who you are, and perhaps even more so for us gardeners. I learned this the hard way when last year my wife and I - very unexpectedly - purchased a new home and sold our old one. With all of the paperwork, negotiations, final remodeling projects, and then packing, I had a lot of work to do... and this was on top of trying to figure out what I was going to do with all of my plants. I had an extensive garden, albeit on a small city lot, but I managed to cram in 60 peonies, more than 150 daylilies, and a huge number of liliium, clematis, and various other individual specimen plants and trees. Knowing that they would likely not be cared for by the new owner, I had a lot of incentive to make sure I took as many of them with me as I possibly could. Thus began the great migration. I learned quite a bit by going through this process, and most of what I did was born out of necessity coupled with the hope of success without guarantee. I think the distinct possibility exists that many of you could find yourselves in a similar situation, so I thought I would offer to you what I found worked and what did not when moving a garden along with an entire household.

The first thing I will tell you is that if you find yourself in this situation be up front with your buyer. Make sure you communicate with them exactly what will be staying and what will be removed, as this could be a huge deal breaker for them. Maybe they were interested in the property solely because of the garden, or maybe they would only be interested if the garden weren't there. Maybe they only want one of your plants, but would allow you to take the others with you. Whatever the case, make sure you have a plan for your plants (and the crater that will undoubtedly be left behind), and let anyone interested in your house know what that plan is.

*There are as many solutions to moving a garden
as there are situations surrounding moving... if you
really want to bring the whole thing, you can.*

I don't know if the case is different in other states, but in Wisconsin, landscaping elements (including plants) are counted as "fixtures" of the home. This means that much like a sink faucet or light fixture, anything "attached" to the house (including to the ground surrounding it) is part of the house and is understood to be included in the sale of the property from the time it is seen by the buyer. You will need to negotiate and come to an understanding regarding these elements with your prospective buyer should you want to remove them if you haven't already done so by the time they have seen it, and it will be good to have this in writing, too. Remember, also, that until the paperwork is signed, almost anything can be negotiated, and it is still your property - including what's in the ground - until the transfer takes place. DO NOT let someone push you around!

So how do you go about formulating a plan? The first thing would be to assess your timeframe. How much time you have and what season it is will greatly impact how much of your garden and what parts of it you'll be able to take with you. As previously stated, I was lucky in that the transition took place in fall and many of my plants were dormant or close to it when I decided to move them. If your move is in spring, though, there are still plenty of options for you to successfully move your garden (as long as the ground has thawed). The only time I could see moving not being an option for your plants is if this unexpectedly took place during the winter, and you were forced to move while everything was still locked in the ground. Though not ideal, you can, remember, always negotiate. Perhaps your buyer will be nice enough to let you come back in the spring to remove some of your plantings. The timeframe can be limiting, too - if you only have a few weeks, you may only have the option to take just a few plants with you... it would depend on how many other things you need to accomplish in order to move, how much help you have, and what your intentions for your plants are once they are out of the ground.

Once you have a good idea regarding your time frame, you would next want to assess the culmination of your situation. That is, what will things look like when all of this moving business has settled down? Will you have the time, space, and will it be the appropriate time of year to replant your garden at your new location? Will the new home require so much landscape preparation that it will be impossible for you to replant for quite some time after you arrive? If moving in spring, you have the whole summer and fall to accomplish this (remember you have to set up your new home, also), but if you move in the fall, this may not be doable. The home I moved to had some neglected garden beds, but nothing large enough to accommodate all of my plants. I would need to relandscape the entire thing, and in the interest of not rushing things and doing it well, I decided to take a number of different strategies with my plants, and all of which seem to be working out well so far.

Make sure you have a plan for your plants (and the crater that will undoubtedly be left behind), and let anyone interested in your house know what that plan is.



The front gardens of my former home - all of these plants were removed.

Many of my plants were transplanted to an interim holding location. Luckily, I have an acre garden plot that exists apart from my old property. Many of my plants were transplanted there for the time being, until I have the opportunity to get the landscaping and garden beds at my new house prepped and ready. Not everyone has this luxury, however, though you might get creative in finding an interim planting location. Ask one or a few friends who have space and offer them pieces of your plants to keep when you come back to dig them up. If you're a member of a garden society, this is a great place to meet "plant friends" who would be willing to do this for you - particularly if it means they can get a few pieces of some things they don't have.

Transplant just a few things to your new property and build your gardens around these anchor plants in the future, or just move them again a few years down the road. There are a number of ways to temporarily store plants and get them into the ground at a later date. Digging up plants that are still growing (not dormant) is an option if you are careful to maintain as much of the rootball as possible. Get it into a pot and keep it hydrated. This is what I did with a number of my clematis, and they are doing just fine. Daylilies are very tolerant of being dug up and transplanted, just trim their foliage back, and let them sit in a bucket with a few inches of water at the bottom. .

They can sit like this out of the ground for weeks if you keep changing the water (though beware, their roots develop an impressive stench after a period of time)

I prepped many of my peonies that were still growing by trimming them back and/or stripping them of their foliage while they were still in the ground and maybe a week or two before I planned to dig them up. After lifting them, I stored a number of them in plastic bags and storage bins with some peat before dropping them into the ground in a few select locations at the new house.

There were some plants, however, that I did not get to replanting last season before the ground froze, and these I left in their containers or plastic bags and set them in my heated garage - a few trees, clematis, and peonies. I keep the temperature in there at about 50 degrees, making their winter dormancy period an easy one with little climatologically derived stress. Now that the weather has turned warmer, I bring them out into the sun during the day and give them a bit of water, returning them to their home in the evening to keep them away from frost. In about a month or so, I'll likely find permanent spots for them outside, and begin the process of planning out my new garden beds.

The last thing you need to determine a solution for is what to do with the aftermath of your former garden. If you are just removing a few plants, you likely don't need to do much of anything in the way of filling in the vacant location. If, however, you have a garden that takes up the entire property, you will undoubtedly have a bit of work ahead of you in leveling out the terrain and planting grass. This is what I did, but again, always communicate with your buyer - maybe they have other ideas about the empty space and would be interested in planting their own garden, building a deck, or something else entirely. I covered my space with a new lawn, and I found that filling in with grass seed was easy enough, provided I kept on top of watering it. I did look into purchasing sod as a quick cover to make the yard look nice, but this was very expensive, and not really something I wanted to invest a lot of money in at the time. It was only a few weeks before the yard was lush and green again.

There are as many solutions to moving a garden as there are situations surrounding moving, and the best advice I can give you is this: if you really want to bring the whole thing, you can. Just be creative, try a number of different strategies to get your plants moved, and don't be afraid to lose something along the way (you can always replace it with something the same, or shop for something better!)



We hope that the gardening season ahead will be a productive one for you, and though we might not see you this year as we had hoped, we hope to hear from you nonetheless! Be in touch with your queries during your quarantine, and stay on top of our website updates as we add articles, additional products, and publish newsletters throughout the year. Take care, and stay healthy and we move into summer.

- Jordan Kabat

- Nate Bremer
